

Medical Matters.

REPORT OF THE GERMAN PLAGUE COMMITTEE.



THE German Plague Committee, sent to Bombay, report their results to the *Deutsche Medicinische Wochenschrift*. They conclude that the virus of plague has three ports of entry: the skin, the lungs and the tonsils. In the majority of cases the infection enters by the skin and the symptoms of blood-poisoning do not appear then till the bacillus has passed the filter formed by the lymphatics. In the glands suppurating, the bacillus rapidly perishes, but grave blood-poisoning may then occur through an infection from the associated streptococci. Infection through the lungs is fortunately rare; but when it occurs, pneumonic centres are set up; and these are seen to contain the plague bacillus. As a means of conveyance, the sputa in such cases is particularly dangerous. Judging from the results at an autopsy made by one of the Austrian Committee, and at which one of the German staff assisted, injection by the tonsils leads to the most rapid general infection, and the cases with tonsils affected are more than all dangerous to their surroundings. The Committee note that examination of the blood most often gives negative results, and for detection of the virus the culture method is the best. The Committee consider that the most valuable point gained by their researches is that they have found the blood serum of *pestiferes* has the same agglutinating power on a pure emulsion culture of the plague bacillus, that typhoid and cholera serums have on Eberth's and the comma bacilli. This fact indicates that with regard to artificial immunisation, plague can be classed with those two affections.

A SCIENTIFIC ATROCITY.

AN Italian was put to death at Auburn on June 2nd, for the murder of a fellow-countryman eighteen months ago. He was placed in the electric chair, and five shocks with a current of eighteen hundred and forty volts each of about one minute duration, were passed through his body at intervals. The poor creature was not pronounced dead until eight

minutes had elapsed after the first contact was made. The five shocks were necessary because of the imperfect contact of the electrode on the man's leg. The smell of burning flesh was quite distinct in the chamber after the first shock had been given. There can be no question that electrocution, as the Americans style the process, is a more cruel and prolonged method of legal murder than either decapitation or hanging. Many accounts of such executions show that either the electric current employed was too weak to kill, and merely caused the most excruciating torture, or was so badly applied as to fail in its immediate object. All thoughtful people now admit that capital punishment is barbarous. Because A. kills B. is no valid reason why C. and D. should kill A. It is ridiculous to plead the Mosaic law as an excuse, because that is certainly regarded as antiquated in other matters of revenge. If A., for example, knocks out B.'s front tooth, the law does not insist upon the removal of A.'s incisor—if he has one—but the Mosaic law enforced this procedure. Still, even if the death penalty be retained, the most ordinary humanity would seem to require that it should be carried out as rapidly and painlessly as possible.

NIGHT SWEATS.

THESE are perhaps almost the most depressing symptom of extreme bodily weakness, and they are, therefore, most commonly found in patients suffering from consumption or other advanced diseases. The description has been given because the attacks of profuse perspiration occur usually during sleep—the patient waking up, perhaps cold and shivering, to find his nightdress and even the bed-clothes saturated with moisture. During recent years, the administration of atropine, which in minute doses possesses the power of checking this abnormal action of the skin, has rendered invaluable aid in preventing this occurrence, and thus saving the patient's strength. During the last year or two, it has been found that sulphonal possesses the property not only of giving refreshing sleep without the detrimental effects exhibited by many narcotics, but also of checking the night sweats of phthisis and other advanced diseases. So, it may be hoped that this distressing symptom may in the future always be, at least alleviated.

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